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FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7287
INFO RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 8581
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 2311
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 9821
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1788
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0793
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE PRIORITY 3047

C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 000912

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/25/2018

TAGS: KDEM PGOV PHUM PREL BG

SUBJECT: SIGMA HUDA SEEKS BAIL EXTENSION AND PERMISSION TO TRAVEL ABROAD FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT

REF: DHAKA 846

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) Sigma Huda, the former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking in Bangladesh, is seeking an extension of her bail, which is set to expire in October. The courts granted Huda - who was convicted in one corruption case and stands accused of corruption, bribery and extortion in several others, bail on medical grounds on August 6. She is also asking for permission to travel abroad for medical treatment.

(Note: Huda is entitled to bail under Bangladeshi law, since an appeal is still pending before the Supreme Court. End Note.)

MEETING SIGMA

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¶2. (C) In a recent hour long meeting with PolOff at her sister's home, Huda appeared in relatively good health and was able to speak at length about her medical condition, court case and the difficulties of prison life. She pointed out that only after much pressure did officials separate her from the general prison population. She vehemently denied involvement in corruption and stated that although her husband was on trial for corruption charges, she had been an independent spouse. She alleged that the military was targeting her because she had been outspoken on the issue of human rights. Though Huda felt strongly that the government's claims were spurious, she was uncertain about her future and suggested that religious political parties might pressure the new government to take a tough line against her because of her activism.

SIGMA'S FUTURE

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¶3. (C) In subsequent conversations with her sister, PolOff confirmed that Huda is undergoing checkups at a local hospital and that her legal team has filed an appeal to extend her bail. They will also seek permission to travel to Singapore or London for medical treatment. A decision is expected before the court adjourns for a month long vacation at the end of August.

COMMENT

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¶4. (C) The outcome of Sigma Huda's trial will hinge upon several factors, including her health and the political environment. Post will continue to monitor the situation closely and urge the Government of Bangladesh to uphold international standards of human rights in its treatment of prisoners and pursuit of corruption cases.

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